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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes several group discussions with parents of high school students, high school students, and nursing students regarding the world of work and the advantages and disadvantages of a youth apprenticeship program. Section I is an executive summary that describes the methodology, summarizes key attitudes toward youth apprenticeships based on eight focus groups with parents and students, and lists recommendations suggested by focus group findings. Section II offers a summary of the report's observations and recommendations, some of which are as follows: parents who do not expect their children to pursue a bachelor's degree support youth apprenticeship, are concerned about a program that separates their children, and believe that to expect 16-year-olds to make a commitment of several years is unrealistic; students are enthusiastic about the apprenticeship concept but are concerned about being able to leave the program if they decide the program is not for them; and nursing students are enthusiastic about youth apprenticeship. Sections III, IV, and V are detailed presentations of the observations of the parent group, high school student groups, and nursing student group. Finally, Section VI provides additional information on the methodology used to conduct the study. It describes the number of participants (7-12) in each group, how they were selected, and their demographic characteristics. (YLB)

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VOICES FROM SCHOOL AND HOME

Arkansas Parents And Students Talk About Preparing For The World Of Work And The Potential For Youth Apprenticeship

VoTech

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A Report on Focus Group Discussions

Conducted by Jobs for the Future, Inc.

For the Arkansas Vocational and Technical Education Division

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For the Arkansas Vocational and Technical Education Division

Voices From School and Home

Arkansas Parents and Students Talk About Preparing for the World of Work and the Potential for Youth Apprenticeship

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April 1991

Voices from School and Home
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Focus Group Discussions

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Special thanks to John Baker, Wanda Banks, Mr. Farrar, Glen Fenter, Phillip Lewis, Earl Moore, Sherry Smith and Beverly White for their assistance in organizing focus groups.

I. Executive Summary

This report summarizes several group discussions with parents of high school students, high school students themselves, and nursing students, regarding the world of work and the advantages and disadvantages of a youth apprenticeship program. The study was undertaken as part of the work of a feasibility study conducted by Jobs for the Future for the Arkansas Vocational and Technical Education Division. The study's purpose was to evaluate the potential in the state for a youth apprenticeship program in several industries, occupations, and geographic areas.

The discussions were designed to determine whether parents and students support the concept of a work-based learning 'youth apprenticeship' program that would lead to high-skill jobs in the allied health fields, industrial machinery maintenance and repair and lab technology in food processing, information services, small business management, metalworking, and food service management.

Eight group discussions were held at four sites across the state to talk to parents and students about these topics. Each group consisted of seven to twelve people, lasted one to two hours, and was led by a trained moderator. The two parent groups were held in Fort Smith and Marianna (Lee County). The five high school student groups were held at West Memphis High (2), Lee High, Fort Smith North Side and Fort Smith South Side. The nursing student group was held at Phillip County Community College. These sites were selected because they are in areas under consideration as youth apprenticeship sites and offered a cross-section of perspectives.

In seven groups the focus was on reactions to youth apprenticeship in general rather than on reactions to the specific industries and occupations. The eighth group, with first year nursing students, was held once a youth apprenticeship in allied health had been identified as a particularly attractive opportunity.

Participants were asked to discuss general work issues. They were then given a brief description of the fundamental elements of youth apprenticeship: a three to four year program starting in 11th grade, in which students would earn credits towards an Associate degree. They would learn both in class and at work in a high quality structured work experience. They might spend 15 to 20 hours a week in the workplace. Teachers would teach more interactively, and coursework would closely integrate school and work. Participants were asked what they thought of a below-minimum wage stipend if that was necessary to entice employers to provide these high quality training positions. They were also asked for their reactions to the several occupations and industries investigated in the feasibility study. A varied number of additional questions were asked in each group.

Summary of Focus Group Findings: Key Attitudes Toward Youth Apprenticeship (based on eight focus groups with parents and students)

Many students and parents around the state are enthusiastic about the youth apprenticeship concept. In it, students see meaningful work experience and adult guidance, an improvement over their current jobs which give them little satisfaction and few learning opportunities. They also see a more reasonable work schedule than the long evening and weekend hours asked of them in fast food and grocery store work. And they see college credits, which is attractive as many worry about how they will pay for college, or whether they will attend at all. Finally, they see a chance to develop the interpersonal skills that they view as key to success in any workplace. Reactions to the word "apprenticeship" are very positive.

Parents who do not expect their children to pursue a B.A. degree directly would like to see them get an Associate degree, depending on the reputation of the local community college. (Youth apprenticeship was presented as a way to earn credits towards an A.A. or A.S. degree.) But many of these parents seem uncertain about whether their child will make it to any post-secondary education. Parents in the rural Delta expect their children to leave and not come back, mostly because of the lack of jobs.

Both students and parents would want to see the following elements included in a youth apprenticeship program.

◆ **Credit towards an A.A. transferable to a B.A.** Students and parents believe that ultimately a B.A. wins out in the labor market. They want to keep open the option to pursue the B.A.

◆ **Exit points.** Students want to be able to leave the program without penalty if they decide it isn't for them. Many parents believe strongly that expecting most 16 year olds to make a several year commitment is unrealistic.

◆ **Integration with peers and extra-curricular activities.** Students worry about the variety of fellow students with whom they will be able to socialize. Parents want a program which does not separate their children from their high school peer group and regular classes. They associate "separate" with "second rate." And if classes were held away from the regular high school, some students and parents fear they would miss out on important extra-curricular activities as "broadening" experiences.

Parents and students want reassurance that the quality of on-the-job apprenticeship training will be high. They disagree over whether grades should be used as the selection criterion for students, for the reasons of fairness, access, and the maintenance of standards. Some are afraid they, or their child, would be screened out due to low grades or high parent income. Some students see this as a program for the non-college bound.

Across the state, students and parents feel similarly about the prospects of youth apprenticeship programs in particular industries and occupations. The most favored are computer and health-related occupations. The least favored are jobs in the food processing industry (which many in eastern Arkansas confuse with fast food service and grocery stores) and in machining. Students are largely unfamiliar with career opportunities in either industry. Some parents' views on opportunities in industrial machinery maintenance and repair are slightly more positive.

Given the strong attractiveness of a youth apprenticeship in the allied health fields, a focus group was held with nursing students. Nursing students are very enthusiastic about the youth apprenticeship concept, at least through high school. They believe there should be an easy exit point after high school and question the value of working part time while getting an Associate degree. They are also concerned that exposure to some kinds of work could be disturbing to young people. Few wish to work in geriatrics, which is viewed as emotionally taxing. They question whether young people could handle working in nursing homes. They strongly recommend that a key design feature of the program be several relatively brief rotations through different types of work within the allied health fields. Nursing students, many of whom are parents, believe a rural Youth Health Corps could address the problem of teen pregnancy.

Responses on travel logistics and pay requirements were inconclusive. Travel to a worksite would be a problem for some, particularly in rural areas. Students have mixed opinions on the wages they would need to earn in order to find youth apprenticeship attractive, although most find low pay insulting. Students look to counselors and teachers for information. They would be interested in hearing directly from employers and workers about the nature of the occupation and the workplace.

Recommendations

Once again, it should be stressed that these recommendations come out of a limited number of discussion groups. More discussion groups will need to be held to confirm the observations of these parents and students and the validity of the following recommendations. The focus group findings suggest the following recommendations.

- **Present youth apprenticeship as a different way of getting both valuable work experience and a college degree, and a more exciting, grown-up way of spending the last two years of high school. Feature the commitment of employers to train and mentor, and the development of both specific and general skills.**

◆ Ensure that the college credits students earn in youth apprenticeship are transferable to at least one four-year school.

◆ Build in clear exit points so that students do not feel trapped.

◆ Include a range of employers, not just food processors, in exploring a youth apprenticeship program in industrial machinery repair. Provide educational opportunities for students and parents who will need to be informed about industrial machinery repair and metalworking as occupations.

◆ Make the development of a youth apprenticeship program in the allied health fields a high priority, since it holds considerable interest among students and parents. The program's design and marketing should help reduce barriers to young men and women in health fields in which they are under-represented. Program design should include rotations.

◆ Make the development of a rural Youth Health Corps in the Delta region a priority.

◆ Further investigate small retail management as a broadly applicable rural apprenticeship possibility.

◆ Aim to recruit employers who are willing to pay minimum wage or above. Below-minimum wage weekly stipends will be insulting to some, not viable for others. However, since many students have few work options, consider below-minimum wage stipends, if they are required for employer participation.

◆ Build extra-curricular activities into the program. Facilitate socializing with non-youth apprenticeship students. Communicate this aspect to students and parents.

◆ Consider travel logistics carefully at the local level.

◆ Develop multi-faceted student selection criteria. Ensure that these criteria respond to student and parent concerns about an elite program which excludes students on the basis of lower grades.

◆ During the start-up of a youth apprenticeship program, hold small student and parent information sessions which feature teachers, counselors, employers, and workers.

◆ Associate youth apprenticeship with high quality higher education in every way possible.

Organization of the Report

Five sections follow this introduction. Section II offers a summary of the report's observations and recommendations. Section III is a detailed presentation of the observations of the parent group. Section IV is a detailed presentation of the observations of the high school student groups. Section V is a detailed presentation of the observations of the nursing student group. Finally, Section VI provides additional information on the methodology used to conduct this study. In the parent and high school student sections, codes are used to indicate the focus group from which the quotes are derived.

Codes:	
MA	Marianna
FSNS	Fort Smith North Side
FSSS	Fort Smith South Side
FS	Fort Smith
WMJET	West Memphis students in Junior Executive Training class
WMG	West Memphis general students

II. Summary of Observations

Observations of Parents

General Issues

Observation #1 — Many parents whose children work are unhappy about the types of jobs available and the long hours their children must work. Many parents whose children can't find work are frustrated at the lack of any jobs, particularly in the Delta region.

Observation #2 — Many parents whose children are not bound for a 4-year college note that their children do not have clear ideas about what they want to pursue. Their ideas change dramatically with limited anecdotal information.

Observation #3 — Parents in the rural Delta expect their children to leave and not come back, mostly because of the lack of jobs.

Education Issues

Observation #4 — Parents who don't expect their children to pursue a BA degree directly would encourage them to get an Associate, depending on the reputation of the local community college. But many of these parents seem uncertain about whether their child will make it to any post-secondary education. The military is an option. Other parents believe strongly that the Associate is outcompeted in the market by the BA.

Work-based Learning Design Issues

Observation #5 — Parents who do not expect their children to pursue a BA directly support youth apprenticeship for several reasons. In it, they see work experience, a more reasonable work schedule, a job for their child, college credits, and the development of interpersonal skills. They are concerned about the quality of on-the-job training and about children being

	excluded on the basis of low grades or high parent income. They are not enthusiastic about the idea of a below-minimum wage stipend, although some acknowledge it would be better than nothing.
Observation #6	**Some parents are very concerned about a program which separates their children from their high school peer group and regular classes. They associate "separate" with "second rate."**
Observation #7	**Many parents believe strongly that expecting most 16 year olds and their children to make a several year commitment to youth apprenticeship is unrealistic.**
Observation #8	**Many parents believe in the importance of extracurricular activities as "broadening" experiences.**
Observation #9	**Parents disagree over whether grades should be used as the selection criteria for students, but this issue is of concern to many of them. Some are afraid their children would be screened out.**
Observation #10	**Parents have negative views on working in the food processing industry. Some parents' views on opportunities in industrial machinery repair are slightly more positive. Parents' views on health-related occupations are quite positive.**

Observations of High School Students

General Issues

Observation #1	**Many students work long hours, often in jobs which give them little satisfaction and few learning opportunities.**
Observation #2	**Students are excited about positive work experiences and feel their experiences play an important role in their lives and personal development.**

Observation #3	**Young people believe they face significant barriers to finding jobs, never mind good jobs, particularly in rural areas. Students whose families have networks are advantaged.**
Observation #4	**For students in rural areas, leaving is a high priority.**

Education Issues

Observation #5	**Most students are convinced that a 4-year college degree is a minimum requirement for the job market. Going to college is also one of the few ways to leave small rural towns that are viewed as offering no job possibilities. But there is undoubtedly a significant "invisible" group of young people whose opinions are difficult to document.**

Work-based Learning Design Issues

Observation #6	**Most students are enthusiastic about the youth apprenticeship concept. Reactions to the word "apprenticeship" are very positive.**
Observation #7	**Students are especially concerned about being able to leave the program if they decide it isn't for them. They are also concerned about the variety of fellow students they will be able to socialize with, and about how extra-curricular activities would fit in. Some see this as something for the non-college bound.**
Observation #8	**Students are most interested in allied health occupations and in computers, with which they are more familiar . They are least interested in working in anything related to the food processing industry (which many confuse with fast food and grocery work) or to machining.**
Observation #9	**Students have mixed opinions on the wages they would need to earn in order to find youth apprenticeship attractive.**

Observation #10	**Students mention DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America), COE (Cooperative Office Education), and STEP (Summer Training and Education Program) as programs similar to youth apprenticeship.**
Observation #11	**Students look to counselors and teachers for information. They would be interested in hearing directly from employers and workers about the nature of the occupation and the workplace.**

Observations of Nursing Students

General Issues

Observation #1	**Delta nursing students express confidence in being able to stay in the area and find jobs, even if it means commuting. They share a strong desire to stay in the area.**
Observation #2	**Nursing students believe that gender stereotyping in nursing is strong, and young men in high school probably discount it as a viable career option. African Americans appear under-represented in professional hospital staff.**
Observation #3	**Nursing students are excited about and proud of their profession. They find it attractive for several reasons: family encouragement; the excitement of the medical field; saving lives; the variety of work; plentiful jobs; flexibility; and opportunities for continued learning.**

Work-based Learning Design Issues

Observation #4	**Nursing students are very enthusiastic about the youth apprenticeship concept, at least through high school. They believe there should be an easy exit point after high school and question the value of working part-time while getting an Associate.**

Observation #5	**Nursing students, many of whom are parents, believe a rural Youth Health Corps could address the problem of teen pregnancy.**
Observation #6	**Few nursing students wish to work in geriatrics, which is viewed as emotionally taxing. They question whether young people could handle working in nursing homes. A few of them are also concerned that exposure to some work could be disturbing to young people.**
Observation #7	**Nursing students strongly recommend that a key design feature of the program be several relatively brief rotations through different types of work within the allied health fields.**

III. Observations of Parents

The participants for the Marianna parent group were recruited by sending invitations home with a selected group of students. The participants were African American and almost all female. Participants of the Fort Smith parent group were recruited by sending invitations home with a selected group of North Side and South Side students and through some ad hoc recruitment. Participants were all white, which is not representative of the Fort Smith area, and mostly female. Groups were held in the evening at a central "neutral" location, and parents were paid an honorarium for their time.

Observation #1

Many parents whose children work are unhappy about the types of jobs available and the long hours their children must work. Many parents whose children can't find work are frustrated at the lack of any jobs, particularly in the Delta region.

Parents have mixed feelings about their children working. Parents of children who have jobs complain about long hours which interfere with schoolwork and family dinners, employers who take advantage, and the paucity of good jobs (only fast food and supermarket jobs are available). Some are unhappy to see their children getting into a vicious circle of making money and then wanting to make more money, especially to pay high car insurance costs once they have a car.

But other parents bemoan the lack of any types of jobs. In the Delta, parents who earn above the federal eligibility cut-off note that their children are not eligible for JTPA jobs and often cannot find work at all.

FS *"Mine doesn't work."*
"Mine doesn't work either."

"There were times when he worked 50 hours a week ... I didn't agree with him working so many hours. On weekends they would stay all night ... But ... on week nights ... that was from 4 - 10. And he had to have his school work done, or otherwise he didn't go."

"I feel that work comes after they finish school. Education is first. Getting prepared to go out into the world. And just like when he was working, well that was taking away from his school days. Plus he was tired. And our family wasn't eating dinner together all the time. And stuff like this. I feel like a lot of times a job interferes with a lot of things."

"Working at fast food places, and the horrible hours involved that nobody else wants. But then they really can't [find] a job doing anything else."

"I just did a study for an English class last year .... if they work 20 hours a week or less then it's okay. But ... Like she was saying, if they're staying at Hardy's until midnight, no, I can't see where there would be a benefit to that."

"They take advantage of teenagers I've been finding out from other parents ... They give them a come-on saying we don't mind if you work just two or three hours. But then it ends up being six to eight hours..."
"I think that's true. It's all or nothing."

"[The kids] start making money and they want to make more money. And then they get a car, and then they have to pay insurance and then it just snowballs. And the insurance and all that is outrageous."

MA *"... like husband and wife making a certain amount of money your children just doesn't qualify for a summer job ... That's why it's so hard ... There's nothing here!"*

"My son is presently working. Of course he works at the supermarket ... but that's the only thing for them to do! We have two new supermarkets here, ... and if they can't get a job there, there isn't anything else for them to do. He couldn't work for JTPA because I make too much money, and luckily he was able to get a job at Food Giant. Now, he's a senior, and he plans to go to college. He has been accepted at Fayetteville, and hopefully will be in the Minority Engineering Program there, and he wants to focus on computers."

"... I've done a lot of volunteer work in the community so it may be pretty good for my children, they've got a chance to get summer jobs..."

"[Auto] Body he got interested in high school ... as of now he doesn't have a job."

"He's [done] ... yard work during the summer ... [and] he enjoyed [summer tutoring] because I think he was telling me he got to work on computers then ... And he likes mechanic work because his father's [handy]."

"... he opened a store ... he's really interested in being in business ... it's like a snack shop ... potato chips, candy and stuff like that, ... and he keeps up with the books on how much profit he makes ... He does all of it. It's just after school. Well, it's really any time ... (laughter) ... any time he has a customer! (laughter)

Observation #2

Many parents whose children are not bound for a 4-year college note that their children do not have clear ideas about what they want to pursue. Their ideas change dramatically with limited anecdotal information.

Many parents whose children do not expect to go on directly to pursue a BA note that their children do not have a good idea—or often any idea—of what they want to pursue. Or their ideas change dramatically with limited anecdotal information. Parents generally have little idea how a child might have become interested in a particular field or adept in a skill area.

MA *"I don't think she really knows what she wants..."*

"[My son] wants to focus on computers ... He just likes it. He does all of my work at home; anything that goes wrong with the TV, the computer, the VCR, he fixes it ... He just picked it up."

"She said engineering one time, and then she changed and said she wanted to mess with computers. So, just whatever makes her happy ... as long as she does it."

FS *"Mine plans on going to college ... he plans on taking up some kind of science, he wants to be a scientist."*

"My son isn't interested [in what comes next] in the slightest bit. That is too far away. That's way far away. It's a whole different world."

"On career days and stuff at school, people come and talk to them from different professions."

"... And they give them a test too, I think. My daughter is always taking one. Tells her what she's good at..."

"I truly don't think that young boys have a very good idea of what they want to do or be. And I don't know about girls."

"... one year John wanted to be a dental tech. Next year he wanted to do something else. Then it's just stuck where they're just not thinking anymore and there's not too many teenagers that I have talked to that really are thinking about the future ... outside of school."

"... this friend of mine ... said that in Little Rock she had a friend who ... made $50,000 her first year in physical therapy. Well, that's what [my daughter] wants to do now. Now, three weeks ago it was a graphic artist. And so before that she's marrying a millionaire and moving to Beverly Hills...I would like my daughter to work so that she could see what life is going to be like if she doesn't put some goals before her. I would like her to work maybe 10, maximum of 15 hours a week. She really thinks if she

doesn't marry her millionaire, she's going to just live on easy street. She's just going to make a fortune and buy a new BMW, her first week when she gets out of high school."

"You know, you're talking about kids not knowing what they want to do. At 40 I don't know what I want to do."

Observation #3

Parents in the rural Delta expect their children to leave and not come back, mostly because of the lack of jobs.

Parents in the rural Delta believe there is little to keep their children there, and little to attract them back. They seem resigned to missing their children, glad that they are creating a better life for themselves elsewhere.

MA *"They don't have nothing to come back [to]."*

"See our children really leaves home. And if we want ... to see them, we got to go see them ... got one that's getting out of Annapolis, 26 years old and he'll be getting out in May. He called me. 'Mama,' he said, 'I can't come back there Mama, you've got to come to Texas.'"

"Aren't no jobs."
"It's the jobs."
"It's the job situation."
"Getting along."

"... a youngster would want to go out and see the world ... But there's nothing to do when you come back home."

"... I guess he'll just have to go off somewhere; you know, and ... I hope it won't be too far!"

Observation #4

Parents who don't expect their children to pursue a BA degree directly would encourage them to get an Associate, depending on the reputation of the local community college. But many of these parents seem uncertain about whether their child will make it to any post-secondary education. The military is an option. Other parents believe strongly that the Associate is outcompeted in the market by the BA.

Parents have mixed feelings about college. Parents who don't expect their children to pursue a BA degree directly would encourage them to get an Associate at Westark Community College or Phillips County Community College, both local to the two parent groups. Fort Smith parents note that Westark's image has significantly improved in the community. Several years ago "it was like the scourge of the earth," while now it is viewed as a viable option by parents and children alike.

But many of these parents seem uncertain about whether their child will make it to any post-secondary education. One alternative is the military, which makes some parents nervous, and which they view as a last, but viable, option. They express a strong desire for their children to find something satisfying that they will really enjoy—whether it is auto mechanics, or industrial machinery repair, or computers, or physical therapy—to not just finish high school but to *be* something, to get into something which enables them to be self-sufficient. Some parents who are struggling want passionately for their children to do better than they did.

Other parents have their sights set higher. They believe strongly that an Associate degree is outcompeted in the job market by a BA, and they want their children to have as many options open to them as possible. Another sentiment is that it makes more sense to do all four years in one go and get it over with, rather than do two now and have to go back later for more.

FS *"... A few years ago, even six years, it was like the scourge of the earth if you had to go to Westark ... And the school has made so much progress that it's really a new option for a lot of the kids."*

"... When my older son graduated six years ago, if he had to stay here and go to Westark ... that was just about the worse thing that could have happened. And a lot of the kids don't have that attitude. So that has changed the area. I think Westark ... is a more viable option."

"If we ever get him out of high school, we'll probably enroll him in a vocational school ... I have followed some other kids that have done similar. And they've done real well. They've graduated from their auto mechanics, gone to work for a local auto dealership or whatever. And what I'm thinking of is to be service manager of a sizable dealership and making good money ... I'd be perfectly comfortable, because ... I want to see him do what he wants to do ... But I see no college in the future for him."

"... committed to a four year Bachelor's degree that I don't use at all, but it did me good to do it."

MA *"... [mine] would like to go to college, if at all possible ... what she wants is what I want her to do, I want her to be satisfied."*

"... she wants to go to college ... to Grendell [in Louisiana], but I can't afford that, I told her she'll get a grant, I don't know about scholarships, I'm hoping some scholarships come in! "

"[my son] is making plans to go to college, and I'm happy whether he goes or not, but he's talked about it and he's looking forward to going to college. Right now; he's undecided on which college he's going to attend. But he either wants to take up computing or body work. I don't know which one right yet."

"... I want him to go to Phillips Community College, and he wants to go to the reserve but he said if he went to college he would study computers because he likes working on them in school."

"My son wants to be a mechanic ... he got a lot of information on different mechanic schools ... he works on cars a lot around the house, and he talked about that and going into the service. But since the war he's hesitating! (laughter) ... He hasn't talked about it a lot. He just got some mail the other day from some school in Tennessee, so he's thinking about going into that ... it's a technical school ... [his teacher] said he was the top in his class, so I think [his teacher] might have been responsible for ... a lot of that mail coming ... from a lot of different technical schools ... I would feel good about it if ... my son is not an A student, so if that's what my son wants to do and he's successful at it, I stand behind him. But I don't just want him to just finish school and just don't try to do anything in life, I want him to go on and be something, you know ... I think really working with being a mechanic, I think he'll really like that."

"My son's in 11th grade now, and he does plan to attend college. He hadn't been in work for so long that he did sign up for this JTPA program ... Now he wants to be an engineer! ... that's what he wants, I'm behind him 100%. I always tell him you know, graduate and continue your education, because I made the mistake and didn't and ... right now I'm unemployed! It's hard. In Lee County it's almost impossible [to find work]. I graduated high school, that's as far as I went. And I think hard about going back to school..."

"... for one thing, whatever field they're going in they're going to need some more training ... so they might as well go for four years. Or they're going to have to go back, ... two years coming out and then going back in."

"I think four years! Other people could go to a community college, took two years and after two years he got to leave and he still had to go to a full year college, so you might as well get in."

"I think ... two years degree certificate are very good ... when they get in the work force they get a lot of on-the-job training."

"... I think a four year is a lot better because like everyone says more experience in the four year. I mean things that they wouldn't pick up in two years, surely they'll catch them at four years. And I would look at it, well, if Ms. X has two years of college and I have four, I'm sure they... would come to me first, more business, with more college experience."

Observations of Parents

Observation #5

Parents who do not expect their children to pursue a BA directly support youth apprenticeship for several reasons. In it, they see work experience, a more reasonable work schedule, a job for their child, college credits, and the development of interpersonal skills. They are concerned about the quality of on-the-job training and about children being excluded on the basis of low grades or high parent income. They are not enthusiastic about the idea of a below-minimum wage stipend, although some acknowledge it would be better than nothing.

Parents express support for the concept of youth apprenticeship for several reasons. Their children would get work experience, which they believe employers value. The work schedule might be less extensive and interfere less with school work and home life than many students' current jobs. Many parents, particularly in the rural Delta, view this as an alternative to their children coming home with nothing to do. They would earn college credits and learn valuable interpersonal skills.

Testing out the idea of a below-minimum wage stipend, parents are about evenly split: about half believe the experience would be well worth the immediate low pay and that, in any case, many of their children could not find any work and this would be an improvement; the other half do not like the idea of their children working for less than minimum wage, or they believe their children would not like it. Parents are concerned about access to the program. Will it screen their child out if he or she does not have As and Bs, as they say the Cooperative Office Education program does? Will eligibility depend on family income, as with JTPA jobs? They are also concerned about the quality of on-the-job training. Will their children be trained to be future managers and owners, or simply workers? Finally, some parents clearly see this as a program that might be good for "other kids," not for theirs, who is going on to a 4-year college.

FS *"It sounds like it would be a good opportunity for any young person..."*

"...they won't hire you if you don't have any experience."

"...really and truthfully even if they worked two evenings, Tuesday and Thursday nights or something like that, it would not be that big a deal."

"... like maybe work two days a week. If they could work 7 to 3, two days a week, and then go to school three days a week, that would be wonderful. That wouldn't interfere."

"Time for their social life and they wouldn't miss that much. Mine, number one is social. That's her extracurricular activity, social."

"What you're saying, I think it sounds good."
"I would like it but she wouldn't do it. Because she thinks that she's God's gift to the world."
"My both would like it."

MA *"Would their eligibility depend on family income? Would that have anything to do with it?"*

"... I'm going to be frank with you, I don't think it would be a reasonable ... cost of living. I just really don't think that 15 hours, $50 a week?"

"... you've got so many credits you've got to get in before you even graduate out of high school, now ... So that's one thing we have to look at about our children, too. But I think it would be nice if we could get some of the employers to do that, for the ones that's able to do that."

"Well $50 is not a lot. I don't know if they'd be happy or not."

"Money and experience, teaching them how to work with people ... get some college credits, it would be nice, I think. But I wish it could happen, but I can't see it happening here. I just don't believe it might. The main problems? I don't know, I just don't believe it would happen. I would love to see it."

"You're saying if the employers say, use my [12th grade] son for example, went on the job and got the training ... Well I really think that's a great idea ... but I know money's not everything, but money is an issue ... last year [my son was going to buy a] ... jewelry store and the man was going to give him the training, so I think that would be a good idea, you know, because he had looked into that and he's still sort of looking into buying this business."

"i think [my son] would be interested, because ... we lived up north for a number of years, and since we've been back here he likes the living here, he doesn't like up there. So I think he would like that, getting training ... but my son, he loves to spend! So it still all come back to money! But, to me I think it would really be a good opportunity for any student to get some training, because when you go to a job, even if you don't plan to go to college ... and they say, what kind of training have you had, and you can put that down, you know - I'm going to use this for an example ... I work in the lab ... And the students didn't want to come to the lab because they feel like people thought they were dumb ... And I told them like this, I said, Don't feel like this because you're getting something that you never had before, you're getting experience on how to go into the computer ... And it's like I've been on the computer all the time! You know? I be just working with it sometime, you know when lunch come I don't even take my lunch I'll be on that computer trying, and experimenting on things, and I think it would be really good for them to have the experience because now, most everywhere you go all you see is a computer.

In the hospital admission room, computers. Everywhere you go is computers! ... Now all I got to do is go to school and get the rest and Lee County has already started me. Who wouldn't want somebody to start them? I would!"

"Well my goodness $50 is more than nothing, just sitting at home not getting anything!"

"... I think it's a very good idea because my son right now he works ... sometimes he enjoys it and sometimes he doesn't because it takes up his Fridays and Saturdays and then his Sunday mornings, and that really gets to him ... Little income he does bring in it helps him to take responsibility for himself, and I always want him to do that! Not just lay back and depend on me all the time!"

"I think that it's a good idea ... even when they go off to college, the experience that they gained from being in these positions may help them as far as maybe getting a job to help themselves go through college! Whereas if they didn't have this opportunity, then the possibility of them getting a job would be basically, limited. Right now they don't have anything to do, so it's always been my thought that anything is better than nothing! A lot of our boys and girls would love to have something to do! It's not that they don't want to, or they don't care. But there's nothing for them to do! ... my son is graduating and he won't be able to participate, but if he were not graduating I think he would be interested in getting involved in it."

"The only drawback I see would be that someone may say, well they're working and they're not getting minimum wages."

"I think ... for some, but I don't think that my daughters would want to go. I mean ... she wants a ... school for four years."

"Now the program sounds good. Maybe you probably need to sit down and sort of pin point it a little better to say, well if this student, you know you might have students that don't want to go right into college ... we got students now, in the 12th grade, earning credit hours already! And when they graduate in May they want to [go] right on to college. They already got credit ... So those students who graduate and really want to go on with their lives are the ones that are going to want to go on, and this program wouldn't be something, you know, if it's a commitment they had to make then I don't think they would commit themselves to do it. Now you might have some students that say well I really don't know what I want to do with my life, I might just want to, you might get that. Those students will go on and participate in it. But them ... Lee County don't have very much to offer, and they're ready to go on with their lives and do something in life, and have something, and make something out of their lives."

"In terms of on-the-job experience, I think it's important that our

children not have the traditional dead end experiences where they are serving as the janitor, those kind of skills. They'll want some skills that will allow them to be in managerial positions ... And one of the things we tell our kids every day is, we don't want you to "dream" to work with somebody else, we want you to dream ... to own the business, so give them the kind of experience to allow them to be in those leadership positions rather than the traditional subservient positions. Because I think the usual work experiences that have instituted around ... vocational education has been at McDonald's, places like that, where kids don't really get the skills that they need to go into the higher positions."

"...many of our parents, and I speak as a parent, see the four year as being the ultimate."

"And I think too many of the parents in this community in particular, have been the victims ... but ... we're going to have to change what they get those associate degrees in ... they had gone into majors where there were no jobs! And I think that is a key point too, not just placing people on jobs just for the experience but place them in positions where in the year 2000 or the year 1990 - something they're prepared for something..."

Observation #6

Some parents are very concerned about a program which separates their children from their high school peer group and regular classes. They associate "separate" with second rate."

Parents in the Fort Smith group were very concerned about a program in which their children would be "segregated" from their high school peer group and regular classes. Even if the program was more challenging and ambitious, and provided more high quality individualized teacher attention, many parents believe their children would lose out on an important social experience. They support the idea of a few separate classes, but would want their children to share some classes with a diverse group of other students. These parents associate "separate" with "second rate." And they are careful to distinguish Fort Smith children from disadvantaged children in large urban areas or in the Delta.

FS *"... I don't like the idea of a segregated bunch of people for any purpose, good or bad. It may be a little bit difficult because of working hours, of getting classes arranged. But I would visualize ideally that there would be no difference. They might be taking a math class with other kids in other fields of endeavor. They're just going to high school and they merely got this program going along with it, just like kids go to high school and they got ROTC. Kids go to high school and they get shop or something else."*

"... I want it to be the mainstream of everything ... socially..."

"Because they're going to feel like they're not a part. And then if

they decide to get out of the program and then go back, here they've been gone from their friends and other classes ... Maybe part of the program would be say from 4-5 in the afternoon, they'll take this extra class that they need as a group. But ... they need to be in the mainstream of high school."

"The social interaction ... is ... important."

"I want my [my daughter] to be a part ... I'm not asking her to be an honors graduate. I just say pass so you don't have to go to summer school. So you can graduate with your class. And then you can make these commitments later on. Just learn a little self-discipline. But in no way would I ever not want her to be in the mainstream. Because you can always catch up academically. You may have to put out a little more effort. But if you lose track socially, then you've lost."

"... it makes a lot of difference in my thinking."

"... are they taking some kind of sub-standard high school courses there? I thought that they were getting the same high school education as the other students?"

"They're not going to have separate classes for all of them are they?"

"If this is a sub-standard abbreviated high school, I wouldn't think it would be good at all."

"I want them to enjoy this. Because when they get out and they're going to start doing work, they're going to work for the rest of their lives. And I'd hate to put this pressure on them ... I don't care how good you make it look. It sounds fantastic."

"[The kids who would do it are] the nerds."

"I think the people that would really love to do something like this, and the young people, they're starting out in life and maybe they haven't had an opportunity to apply the education. They're just learning that they've got to make a living and they have all these responsibilities..."

"I was thinking more of the kids that were having a hard time in school and who were going to drop out anyway, and were looking at Burger King as an option of okay, I have no other options, I can't pass school."

"I don't think a 16 year old will see it that way though. [Kids will see it as:] there's that wonderful world waiting for me."

"I don't think they'll see it as an option. I don't know. I think they'll see it maybe as punishment. Because I can't go to college. I'm not smart enough."

"I think it's going to be a second rate college ... You can go to U ... or you can go here and learn this. It sounds like a vocational school."
"Which is okay too."

"... My son will say "I'm not going there." There are some classes he won't go in because "mom, they're all thugs. I don't care how good it is, I'm not going to that class. You might as well just take me out of school."

"We're just a little better off..."

"You're more or less talking about kids from Chicago and places like that. And Queens, New York."
"Yeah, crowded ghettos and a high density of minorities ... Low economic people."
"Like in the Delta, they don't have a lot, there's not a lot there ... it may do really well, just as a way out."

Observation #7

Many parents believe strongly that expecting most 16 year olds and their children to make a several year commitment to youth apprenticeship is unrealistic.

Many parents believe that it is not realistic to expect their children, or most 16 year olds, to make a several year commitment to youth apprenticeship. Some note, for example, their own and their older children's experience in college, switching colleges and majors several times. One suggestion made by parents is to rotate juniors through some kind of job exploration as a precursor to the program, and to start the program up in the senior year. They also affirm the importance of a several month "checking out" period at the program's start.

FS *"You'd definitely know within three months I would think."*

"I don't know any child that would be ready to make a three year commitment at that age."
"Not at that age."
"One in 100."

"My older son changed his major three times in college. And the small percent that would make the commitment, at that age, by the end of the second or third year, he or she will probably have decided this is not for me."

"If you started out with 8%, at the end of the road you probably wouldn't have 3%."

"What if they said eight months into it "you can have this thing, I'm not doing this anymore." These kids don't do what they don't want to do."

"Three of my son's teachers said he was putting his head down during class. They don't have to do anything. If they want to sleep, they sleep. Why would they think they had to stay in a program?"

"My son said he thought he just wasn't going to worry about it this year. He thought he would just wait and graduate with these other kids. And so I said, no, you will go to summer school this summer, and next year. And he just thought it would be okay. He'd just kind of hang out and then he'd just graduate with these others. There was no stigma to that. They think they can quit. That just amazed me. I think building it in will help the parents, because like you, the parents are there saying "you are going to graduate. Because it matters to me that you graduate on time.""

"... this business of trying to get a commitment out of someone 16 years old, I think you're looking at a very difficult, if not impossible, task ... After you graduate from high school, come join the army, learn a trade, learn radio, learn computer, whatever, you got a commitment. They're a little bit older there. A lot of them will seize a good opportunity that they have there. But I don't believe in a long range plan that's starting and trying to get commitments out of 16 year old kids, that you're going to have a great deal of success. Especially because they're not used to ... Somebody said one in 100. I don't know, I'll say 10 in 100 will say "well I'll try that". The first eight months, well 3 of those 10 are probably going to drop out. The others, some of them are going to stay there because it's opportunistic. It gives them a little income. They just keep that until they get out of high school."

"If ... children were in a desperate situation, ... knew if they didn't do this, that they had no future, then you might have a bigger commitment."

"... I just don't think ... they'll wind up doing the program ... You have to make it something really fantastic for them ... If he decided that's not what he wanted to do, and he was really unhappy, I'd say "Hey, you're 17, you don't have to do anything you don't want." ... If I hate my work I would quit ... I think the ones that are going to really bail out will bail out very quickly. But with three months get them back into their program, that's three months that my son could miss."

"I think the senior year [would be a better time to start the program]."

"They have exploration in the 7th grade here and that's when they take music and art, ... computers. They have nine weeks of each. And maybe in the junior year program take them in and put them in four different things. Rotate four different areas whether it would be medical field or electronics, whatever. And it might give them an idea of hey, this is fun, it's interesting, I might like to do this. And then let them make a commitment maybe in their senior year."

I personally would love for Charlotte to do something like this. But making her make that commitment, I don't think we could do it. That's what concerns me is the commitment. It's three years commitment."

"... my older son ... He's in his third school in five years. And he's on his third major..."

Observation #8

Many parents believe in the importance of extra-curricular activities as "broadening" experiences.

A small number of parents think it's a bad idea to let their children work during high school, since "you have to work the rest of your life."

FS *"They should have a few to keep them life broadened..."*

"My son plays baseball ... And he either practices or he plays everyday. When you play high school ball you don't work during that season ... And I personally never did want my kids to work. I feel like there's a time to work and it's after high school. And if you do well and you participate—like I said, not just in sports but in different activities—then you're a lot better, more well rounded. You have to work the rest of your life. But I see that a lot of people disagree with that. I'm definitely in the minority I think."

Observation #9

Parents disagree over whether grades should be used as the selection criteria for students, but this issue is of concern to many of them. Some are afraid their children would be screened out.

Parents are concerned about the selection criteria for students. Would students be screened out if they didn't have high grades? Some argue that standards provide an incentive for students who want to participate. Others view this as a potentially exclusionary, elitist approach.

FS *"It wouldn't be a good idea if it's just for A, B students."*

MA *"What criteria would you use to choose the participants?"*

"But I would think that they would at least be an average student, at least."

"It should be someone who's serious and who's interested in the program, and usually if it's that kind of person it will be a person who has at least a C average."

"I agree with the grade point average, because ... I take my daughter, what if she wanted to work? ... Now bring that grade point average up so you get the job!"

"... but then there are some students who really want to do something for themselves, and cannot maintain a grade point average. So what do you do about those children, as far as this program is concerned? if grades were considered?

"I'm not sure that I agree ... I think that kids are motivated to do whatever they want to do ... I experienced just last week at the downtown ... kinds taking their driver's test ... most kids passed that test ... Now I saw some other kids who were so-called the upper grade level kids who didn't pass it ... it has to do with motivation ... wanting to do something."

Observation #10

Parents have negative views on working in the food processing industry. Some parents' views on opportunities in industrial machinery repair are slightly more positive. Their views on health-related occupations are quite positive.

FS *[Industrial machinery repair in food processing.]*
"[Food processing makes me think of] ... a chicken plant."

"I wouldn't want my son to do that. It's dangerous."

"A lot of the equipment for big companies with line planners ... is made in Europe. It's very technical ... There's no one in this country that could fix it. They're bringing in technicians from Europe to work on their machines."

"...everything is becoming computerized ... When they're unloading trucks here in Port Smith, ... they have to go to read that computer printout ... And the average warehouse worker could not do that. So they are needing more skilled people because of the way it's advancing ... I think a technician working on one of those large machines would probably end up making good money. He would be well trained ... But bringing a man to that plant the first day would probably be very difficult."
"Not if you explain to them what he'd be doing."
"Have you ever been there?"
(Laughter)
"It's not that bad ... And there's lots of people who work hard ... and they earn a good living."
"... the chances are they [high school students] might have to be there anyway. Because we don't have a lot of other options."
"...maybe not my child or yours. But if we're representing the students at Fort Smith, there's a lot of kids that don't have ... the option ... maybe not because of intelligence, but because of finances."

"I think that's true ... they're going to be there anyway. It certainly would be better for them to be preparing the machines."

"It just smells ... Plus the inconsistency. There may be a layoff and back on. It has negative implications: ... Pay, working conditions and inconsistency."

[Allied health fields]
"My daughter would go for the health services. My son would probably go toward the equipment repair field."

MA *"Sounds good! ... one of my daughters ... went to nursing homes and houses, she worked with the elderly. And she enjoyed it. I got some of her books at home. ... she did a term paper on diabetes patients and ... that sounds great!"*

IV. Observations of High School Students

Participants for the high school groups were selected by school administrators. Each included a relatively even balance of young men and women. The Fort Smith groups were heavily weighted towards at-risk students and those who were unlikely to pursue college immediately. Participants were almost all white, but included one or two African American and Asian students. One West Memphis group was a Junior Executive Training (JET) class. Since the feasibility study sought to examine ways that youth apprenticeship could build on entrepreneurship training, particularly in the Delta region, the views of these students were of particular interest. The other West Memphis group included general and college-prep students. The Marianna group was more heavily weighted towards college bound students and had a mix of white and African American participants.

Observation #1

Many students work long hours, often in jobs which give them little satisfaction and few learning opportunities.

Many students work long hours, up to 40 hours per week in addition to school. They work in fast food restaurants and grocery stores. A few work because their parents can't or won't support them. Others work to pay car insurance and to have extra spending money. Many students say they work to keep busy, to reduce the boredom of returning home and watching TV, which they see as the alternative. Many students feel they have little negotiating power with employers and that they are exploited. They express a certain amount of outrage at being paid minimum or sub-minimum wages, and frustration at being manipulated into working longer hours than they want to, both late on school nights and long weekend hours. They share a passionate dislike for fast food jobs.

A minority of students have jobs that they find interesting and enjoyable. Generally these students work fewer hours (up to 15 per week). They report that their jobs keep them busy, engaged, and meeting interesting people. Some students work only during the summers, preferring (or abiding by their parents request) to use the school year to study and perhaps engage in sports. Students whose parents don't allow them to work generally support their parents' decision and sound like they spend more time on homework.

WMJET

> *"I just started last week, and I've been working Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. It is more than I wanted, but I just started doing that to help with my car."*
>
> *"I work more or less full time. You get paid every other Tuesday and I had 85 hours in two weeks."*
>
> *"Those weekends are long hours."*

"You have to give up your weekends, and I don't like that."

"I think they take advantage of teenagers. My friend was telling me that after her three month waiting period was up, they were still paying her $3.35 an hour.
That's not fair. When I started out last summer I made $4.50 and then when I went back at Christmas I made $4.75. And now they are starting at $3.35. They are taking advantage."

WMG

"I work at the Country Club over there. I work behind the desk and caddy and fix cars. I just do a lot of odd jobs. And it's just something for me to do. Something to keep me from being lazy. Gives me money if I go to the mall."

"I work at Kentucky Fried Chicken. Mostly I just work at taking orders. I'm doing it for the money right now."

"I work as an aerobics instructor. It's fun. I get to meet a lot of interesting people. It makes me feel good about myself. I get in shape and I've worked with a lot of people, so I like that."

"I worked at Big Star. We all quit-I was depressed."

"I'm working for Budweiser. I'm like a landscaper. And I pick up garbage and trim hedges and plant trees and all that. And I definitely don't want to do that when I graduate!"

LHS

"I don't work. I worked during the summers, but during school I concentrate on my studies."

"I worked with five and six year old boys and I liked it. I've worked with them for the last two summers, but I haven't worked during the school year. I participate in sports so all my evenings are spent at practice and then school work."

"I work in a grocery store. It's okay. It's something to do after school instead of staying at home."

"I work at the elementary school. I clean up. It's just for spare change."

"I'm a tutor."

FSSS

"I don't like it (working 40 hours per week). Too many hours to be working and be going to school."

"I'm working full-time and going to school. On the application I put part-time, but they make me work full-time. "
"I work at Show Biz Pizza and get in 20-25 hours a week."

"It's a lot of busy work, so it keeps you occupied the whole time you're there, so I like that. I don't want to be sitting there doing nothing. That drives me up a wall. And I get money on the side to pay insurance (for my car)."

"I work at USA Truck. I just fuel trucks as they come in and inspect them, see what's wrong with them."

"I work at Braum's (an ice cream store). I go to school in the day and at night I work. I work approximately 30 hours a week. I don't like it. I don't want to stay there all the time. I do it just to do something."

"(I work to) pay insurance, buy clothes, survive. To a certain extent my dad will help me out but I got to pay for some stuff."

"I work a lot of hours. Have blood shot eyes, and fall asleep in class. And people wonder why I don't get the schoolwork done."

"There are only fast food jobs in town. I don't want to work in fast food! I hate it!"

"My parents won't let me work."

"I worked at a construction site, and I would sit around. I wasn't doing anything very helpful."

Observation #2

Students are excited about positive work experiences and feel their experiences play an important role in their lives and personal development.

Students become very excited in talking about a positive job experience. The most commonly noted positive aspect of a good job is that students believe it is helping them learn how to interact with different types of people, both customers and work colleagues. In rural areas, a small number of jobs enable students to get to know "important" people in the community who may be future sources of jobs. Students who work as tutors appreciate the perspective-taking value of their jobs. Now they understand what their parents and teachers "go through."

Being able to learn a skill, like cooking or working on computers, boosts students' self-esteem. Those who have worked in an environment which was challenging and where their supervisor treated them "like a grown-up" and expected them to take responsibility are the most excited about work and their role in a workplace. Finally, many students have been turned on to certain courses—such as computer classes—because they have seen them in many of the places they have worked.

WMJET

"Most of the businesses I've worked in use computers. The reason that I'm taking all business courses, like shorthand, OTM and stuff like that is to help me in my career, the law field. "

"This summer I started to work with my mother. I was a computer operator. I liked it because I got to talk to people from all over the world. They would call in from China and Japan. And right now I work at Big Star. You meet a lot of interesting people, and I hope that being able to meet people will help me in the future. You get to know the personalities, and you get to learn how to deal with the good and the bad. Right now it's helping me buy my car, though, and that's good!"

"I'm working for my dad at his insurance company here in West Memphis. I'm a file clerk. It's fun to me, because you get to meet different people, and get to talk to them. And so many people come in, and you get close to some of them. It's just like one big happy family up there. My dad has two computers up there. I work on them sometimes to figure out quotes for him. When I graduate he wants me to get a bachelor's degree in computers. It's really given me the direction I've been looking for."

"Last summer I worked at the Health Center in Medical Records. You know, I didn't realize it was that hard. When I started working there, it was just a summer job, and the boss treated me like I was a grown-up."

"I work at Big Star as a sacker, and once in a while I'll run the registers up front. It helps me get to know everybody who comes in, especially some older folks that come in and ask for help. It's nice to help people out. It might help me (after graduation)...to be able to talk to other people on the job, and after a while maybe I'll get used to this and I could have something to fall back on after I retire."

LHS

"I tutored this summer. Yes it was (a good experience), because my mama was a teacher. I see how she feels, having to come home and deal with me!"

"I'm working at Sunny Drive-In. It's a fast-food drive-in. I have become more responsible and I'm learning a lot, like how to cook!"

WMG

"I work at Anheuiser-Busch. In certain ways it'll help me, like if I ever want to start a business in town. It'll give me relations with people in this town so that I can get opportunities that I wouldn't otherwise have. We produce beer, and most adults drink it! So I'm in contact with all kinds of "important people.""

"I work at the West Memphis Club as a page. It has taught me that I have to get along with people in order to work with them. I have to pay for my car insurance, so I have to learn responsibility—if I don't show up for work, I don't have a car."

"I work at the Creative Enrichment Day Care at the First Baptist Church and it is a lot of fun. I get to work with a lot of people that are really nice, but it has helped me to see that you have to get along with different people to work. And also the children, I like them a lot. I don't know if it's going to help me much in my career. But if I ever have kids it will be a good experience."

FSSS

"I work in a bowling alley. They have a lot of new machines, and we had to learn how to use them on our own time, learn how to fix them, and things like that."

Observations of High School Students

Observation #3

Young people believe they face significant barriers to finding jobs, never mind good jobs, particularly in rural areas. Students whose families have networks are advantaged.

Young people report significant barriers to finding jobs. Especially in rural areas, there are few jobs. And those employers who are hiring would rather hire older people. Young women face an additional barrier in some cases. For the few good jobs that are available, employers hire through the grapevine. Especially in rural areas, informal contacts and social networks offer some young people significant advantages.

WMG

"Most of the places where you go around they'll tell you that they're taking applications but they never call."

"My mom works with one of the women at the school who works at the library part time and she told her that there was an opening and so I went to the personnel office and applied. [That's how I got this job.]"

"It's a small community!"

"I guess my boss had known me. I went to that day care when I was younger. And they needed a teenager to work after school."

LHS

I teach seventh and eighth grade math, and I don't like it at all. (I can't get another job) because that's all there is.

FSSS

"Employers around here don't want a teenager working for them. They just think we party all the time and are not going to work."

"Say you have two people who have the same amount of experience, except one's 18 and the other's 16, one's a guy and one's a girl. What are you going to do if the employer says, 'Well I want an 18 year old guy. I don't want some girl working for me.' My dads has a partner and this guy came in and he was 40 years

old and he had three years experience. I knew how to run all the machines, and I had three years experience, I could do everything fast. This guy was like a turtle. And my father's partner hired this man over me because he was (older) and because he was a guy."

"The companies that are here are basically all set."

"You can't find a job if you don't have the experience. (My friend) graduated from college, and she couldn't find a job for about four months. Everybody said she needed experience."

Observation #4

For students in rural areas, leaving is a high priority.

Students in rural areas complain most of boredom. The town of Marianna, for example, doesn't even have a movie house, according to students. They complain of nonexistent recreational activities. And according to students, there aren't any good jobs. Finally, some want to explore and acknowledge that they might want to return afterwards. Many of them express a kind of "love-hate" relationship with the town they grew up in: it's their community, their friends are there, it's safe; but it offers so little in terms of work and things to do. If they can commute to a good job—in Memphis for example—some might like to do that.

WMJET

"It's boring. West Memphis is really boring."

"You've come to a bad place."

"This is a country hick town."

"There aren't any "true" jobs in this area, except for maybe manual labor jobs, things like Big Star, and grocery stores. But this is pretty much a place to move on from, if you want any kind of career."

"(People leave this area and) go over the river. They work in Memphis."

"I'd rather live here and work in Memphis. They're nuts over there. They'll kill you."

"There are some good neighborhoods and the crime rates are low. But to find jobs, it is really a place to move from."

LHS

"Get out! Out of town!"

"It's too small. And no jobs, recreational facilities or things to do. There's no business here."

"The jobs are in big cities."

"You've got to explore."

"(People who go to college only come back for) Thanksgiving and Christmas."

WMG

"Go to Memphis. Don't stay here."

"West Memphis is boring."

"I'd like to leave, but everyone I know is here. If I could just take all these people and go to another town!"

"It's like an old home town."

FSSS

"There's nothing here. It's dead."

"For people who are off on the weekends, there is nothing to do."
"And that's the reason so many kids get into trouble."

Observation #5

Most students are convinced that a 4-year college degree is a minimum requirement for the job market. Going to college is also one of the few ways to leave small rural towns that are viewed as offering no job possibilities. But there is undoubtedly a significant "invisible" group of young people whose opinions are difficult to document.

Many students see only two alternatives: pursuing a 4-year college degree or getting stuck in unemployment or dead-end factory work in a backwater town. For many, their high school work experiences have further convinced them of the need to put themselves in the position of commanding a significantly different work setting. A minority of students are knowledgeable about and interested in two-year programs, for example in business and computer technology. But there is undoubtedly a significant number of young people from whom it is difficult to hear. This would include high school drop-outs, college drop-outs, and those students who say they are going on to college, but don't.

WMJET

"I'd say about half (of my friends) went to college, and half of those dropped out and half stayed in."

"I'm looking forward to graduation, because I plan on going to State Tech and studying business. I think one day I'd like to own my own business, a tanning salon or something like that."

"I'm looking forward to graduating and going to college. I seem really good at economics."

"I'm going to go to college and study computers and insurance. And when I graduate from college I'm going to follow in my father's footsteps and take over his insurance company."

"After I graduate I am going to attend some kind of computer tech school."

"I plan to go to the Art Institute in Dallas and study media broadcasting. And who knows from there?"

WMG

"I work at the West Memphis Club ...and it makes me realize...that I have to have an education so I won't be working for minimum wage. I have to go to college and get an M.B.A."

LHS

"Most of my friends go to college."

"They go to college because there are more jobs. And it gets them out of Marianna."

"I plan to attend Hampton University in Virginia and major in engineering."

"It used to be that with a high school education you could find a good job. You can't find that. They want you to go to college."

"I plan to go to the University of Central Arkansas and major in health administration."

"I plan on going to college and major in music."

FSSS

"You don't go through school and decide. Oh, I'm going to work in a factory. Some people just end up that way. They don't go through college, and they end up having to work in a factory."

Observation #6

Most students are enthusiastic about the youth apprenticeship concept. Reactions to the word "apprenticeship" are very positive.

Most students express considerable interest in the youth apprenticeship concept. They like the idea of getting a meaningful job and work experience, learning skills experientially, seeing a connection with school work, having a mentor who has an interest in training them, earning college credits, and being better able to afford college. A few who have an interest in setting up their own businesses view youth apprenticeship as a way to find out the nuts and bolts of running a business. Some express enthusiasm for the program simply in that it might provide some job opportunities where there are so few. Students associate the word

"apprenticeship" with individualized learning from a skilled person who really wants to teach them what they know. Many students are doubtful that local employers will be either sufficient in number or in interest.

WMJET

"I think it sounds good."
"Me too."
"I like that idea."

"I think it would help. It would encourage people to do more. You get to go to work and learn about it. I think it would encourage people to do better in work, and in school, too."

"Yeah, it would give them a better outlook on working."

"I think that it would be a good opportunity for kids who want to go into a lawyer's office and to learn stuff like that."

"I think if you could find the proper place to work that is going to benefit you, I think it'd be great. But I think it will help you out more, say, if you wanted to be a lawyer if you could work there for a while, rather than working at Big Star. There's not a lot of places around here that you could get involved in the program."

"It would be nice to have something a little more constructive than frying hamburgers or sacking groceries, which is pretty much the norm here."

"Something more constructive, where you're actually learning a skill or just job experience."

"It sounds like it would be a lot of fun, instead of staying here in school and learning what you can in class. Plus you get to talk to somebody who's really going to teach you a lot more at that particular skill, or maybe even learn different skills at the same time."

"When people make it more interesting you can learn better, like hands-on training."

"It seems to me like we're just learning the same things over and over."

"I think it's good because a lot of people just sit up here and take classes they don't even need just because we have to have seven classes. So I think if you could go out and do a job it would be a lot better."
"It'd get people more involved in school, more interested."

"The program has a lot of good ideas. I think it would be difficult to institute in an area like this; there's just not a lot around here. I mean there's a few large agricultural businesses."

LHS

"It sounds good."

"I guess I could use some training. I'd find out how to run my own business."

"I think it's good because I can use all the financial help I can get for college, and earn a degree."

"Considering what I want to go into in college, business administration, I'm not really interested in it. I think for people who don't know exactly what they want to do, if they just tried it they might find that they are really good at it and then continue."

"I wish you had thought about it a couple of years ago!"

"It is learning a trade."

FSSS

"It sounds pretty good. It would make you grow up faster."

"I think most people would gladly take a job."

Reactions to the word "Apprenticeship"

WMJET

"It seems positive."

"It means hoping that they'll give you those little secrets and tips and everything that made them successful."

"To me it means working under another person, and learning everything that they know."

"It is like passing certain traits from one person to another."

WMG

"Working under someone."

"On the job training, with someone over you."

"Studying under a person to learn a trade."

Observation #7

Students are especially concerned about being able to leave the program if they decide it isn't for them. They are also concerned about the variety of fellow students they will be able to socialize with, and about how extra-curricular activities would fit in. Some see this as something for the non-college bound.

Students are especially concerned about being able to leave the

program if they decide it isn't for them. If they left during the middle of their junior year, would they lose credits and have to repeat the year? They are also concerned that the program will limit their range of curricular options and that it may not prepare them adequately for a 4-year college program should they wish to stay for only the first two years during high school. And a few wonder whether credits earned could be applied to out-of-state 4-year schools they might like to attend.

Some have strong concerns, including how extracurricular activities would fit in, and not having enough time for themselves and their schoolwork or feeling over-controlled. Some view it as a program for the non-college bound and those who don't yet know what they want to do. And some also feel that four years is too long a commitment. They don't like the idea of interacting mostly with a smaller group of students in the same program. And a few wonder about how the program will deal with negligent employers. Students in a couple of groups suggested that the program start off with an introductory course or a rotation through several workplaces.

WMJET

"What if you decided that it wasn't for you? If you're trying to be a lawyer, and you decide that it wasn't for you, could you get out of it, and would you lose all of the credits you had earned?"

"There is no way seniors can get into it, is there?"

WMG

"It would also limit the other stuff. If they're concentrating on what you're learning at work, what about the other stuff you're supposed to learn, like the ACT [achievement test]? I doubt the jobs we'd have would have anything to do with ACT or getting into college."

"I don't know. School in the afternoon? I want to go home if I want to, and if I want to work, I want to go to work. It's too much like someone controlling my life.

"I wouldn't do it, because it would limit you."

"The way you're putting it, you have these basic classes that you have to have. You can't have any different credits, you just have to stick to this, and you have to stay there. You're not going to have any range or any other [areas] that you might be able to major in."
"What would happen if you got out and you did this job for two years and you decided that you didn't like it. Where does that leave you?"

"The four year thing is kind of long."

"Maybe if it was a two year thing, just for the high school years, it might be easier for people who might change their mind and

want to go to college. They could go right after high school instead of trying to earn credit through a job that they didn't really like that much. Four years is a long time to be committed to something. What if you decided you wanted to go to college because all your friends were?"

"There's a problem, because you wouldn't see your friends. You wouldn't be spread out where you could socialize with other people. You'd be stuck with the same 25 people, which really isn't that good, because you'd be seeing the same faces all day."

"Some parents would not be too hot about their kid having two or three days off from school to go to work."

"Would you have to have specific grades for this? If you started to fail, would they kick you out? Would you have to excel?"

"If you want to get out of it after two years, can you transfer to another place, or do you have to stay where you are?"

"Is this just for college in Arkansas? Or would you have to go over the bridge and pay out-of-state tuition?"

"It'd be better if we could do this and be able to choose if we wanted to go into the city or go to Illinois, or anywhere we want. And we want to make sure our college credit does not only count in Arkansas but can count anywhere."

"Maybe after you graduated your next two years you could transfer to another state, or to another place where there is business."

"It would be good if we could choose the college you wanted to go to and have them transfer your job to that city and in that city you could go to college and work part-time."

"Would everyone be working at the same job? How would teachers with 25 students teach something about everybody's different job?"
And if you limit it to 25 people that's going to count out a lot of people who are going to want to do it."

LHS

"It would be for some people. Some kids might not want to go to college."

FSSS

"I think that the problem would be saying things that the students don't really care too much about. It's not going to relate to something that the students are interested in."

"What if after your junior year you decide that, being a senior, you don't want this. Can you get out? Will those credits be transferable? Are you going to have to have 20 credits or like four that you got your junior year?"

"It should be flexible so that you could start up in the middle of the year."
"Or that seniors can get in at anytime."

"It should start off as a semester course."

"You couldn't start right off, because it would be a dramatic change for those in the program. "

"How many hours would it be in comparison? Would the classes be standard math and science, or would it be more than job related?"

"Suppose you run into an employer who really doesn't care?"
"What about an employer who hires you and then he says, 'Okay, I want you to follow this man for the day' and that guy couldn't care whether you live or die?"

"I need to have time to myself, too, so I can do my homework and stuff, and I don't have it, because I work outside of school."

"The stuff here takes up time, if you have a job or do extracurricular activities. Cheerleading is from 3:15 until 6 or 7 at night. So when do you have time to work?"

"It sounds like you'd have to change classes. You'd have to rearrange your English class to suit the job."

Observation #8

Students are most interested in allied health occupations and in computers, with which they are more familiar. They are least interested in working in anything related to the food processing industry (which many confuse with fast food and grocery work) or to machining.

A significant number of students (almost all young women) are enthusiastic about the concept of youth apprenticeship in the health fields. Many realize this is one of the few areas that jobs are available locally and in relatively nearby urban centers. Hospital work is well-regarded. Most students' interest in, and familiarity with, the field comes from a family member who may be a nurse. Computer training and computer-related occupations are also quite popular since the skills are viewed as applicable in a broad range of work environments. Students who have an interest in setting up their own business are supportive of a youth apprenticeship program in retail management.

Students react negatively to occupations in machining or in the food processing industry. They associate machining with heavy machinery and danger. Students associate food processing with a range of food-related settings: low-skill, smelly, low-paid and dead-end chicken processing, grocery store work, and fast-food jobs.

WMJET

"Machinery sounds kind of dangerous compared with what you might want to work with. I'd rather do it as a hobby, not a job!"

"Self-employed sounds pretty good. There's not a lot of people around here to be employed from. Medical? Memphis has a lot of good medical facilities. Food processing? In don't think there's much of that around here. Computers? They're good because that's always an increasing field, no matter where you are. That's just a good skill to learn, in any career."

"When you say food processing that's what comes to mind- working with food, slapping hamburgers around. You don't think of anything else."
"Except McDonalds!"
"You're talking about testing it(food)? "

"We were considering entrepreneurship, me and this other boy."

"I think the most interesting one to me was going into somebody's business that they own."

"I think I would do the program in self-business. There's a bunch of self-businesses around here, in fashion, boutiques and stuff, and I could work in there and see how to get involved and see exactly what it takes."

"If you looked in the paper the help wanteds are in nursing and machinery. When I was looking for a job that is all there was, being able to engineer and for LPNs and RNs. That is all that is offered around here."

"I'd probably take computers. Because you could learn about how to operate and service computers and then go into business for yourself. Then you could probably go to a different city where places really have computers fixed or programmed."

WMG

"I don't know if I would be interested in business, accounting or banking."

"I think it's a great idea! I want to be a registered nurse. You've got to know how to work with people, you've got to be compassionate. I think it's a great opportunity to get in there and have some real grounding experience. I think it's good. And if that's what you want to do it can be a great choice."

"I have an interest in child psychology, somehow working with children. I think that it would help me a lot, after I graduate, to go into psychology. I think it's a good program."

"I like the medical field. I want to get my degree in chemical engineering. [The program sounds interesting] because I'd be able to get job experience and earn college credits."

"My mom is a registered nurse and she's telling me if you get a nursing degree you practically have a job for life over there (Memphis) because they're always hiring. And I wondered if this program was going into nursing, you would have to include Tennessee so you have a place to train."

"It doesn't sound like they had anything to do with English education or maybe chemistry. They should have something like education. They should start a program teaching us how to be better teachers and then maybe there wouldn't be so many complaints."

"I'd want to be pretty free to come and choose what I wanted to do. Right now I'm pretty set that if I were to go into an area of science I'd want to do what my dad does. He's a pharmaceutical representative. I like his job; I like the benefits. Maybe you could set up branches for students. Maybe if you know exactly what you want you could go in and arrange something with the company."

"The list you gave had the basis of work but it didn't have anything like theater, cinema, broadcasting, singing or anything like that. There's a lot of money in that, too."

"There's always going to be requests for doctors and biochemists and nuclear engineers. There isn't a big request here for them, so there would be more opportunities in other places."

"Not many people are going to want to do certain jobs. Some people aren't going to be patient enough to sit at a desk. Some people need to be out in an open area."

LHS

"I don't think I'd like all that heavy equipment. I want business."
"Food Processing? I think of it as being boring."
"Negative connotations."
"A grocery store."

FSSS

"Food processing makes you think about a chicken processing plant."
"The smell."
"That's something that you couldn't go far with."
"It's a blue collar job. Everybody wants a white collar job."

"They have a program here in town at the hospital where you come in and work, get experience. If you're under 18 you can come in without pay, and if you're over 18 you have to have a college degree. I think it would be a good idea if you could set something up like that."

"I have (thought about going into business). I have this thing where I wanted to open up a club, something like a night club. But this really wouldn't be the town to open one up in."

Observation #9

Students have mixed opinions on the wages they would need to earn in order to find youth apprenticeship attractive.

A few believe they do not have the luxury of being able to earn less than enough to support themselves. A larger number of others insist on staying above minimum wage as a matter of pride. It seems to be a benchmark in how they are valued. Many students, however, express less concern for the pay (during high school years) as long as they are getting good training, work experience and college credits.

FSSS

"We definitely (have to get) more than minimum wage."

"Even if you don't buy your own clothes and stuff you have to buy some things. You've got stuff at school you do, you've got clothes to buy, some people have a car payment. Fifty dollars a week isn't going to get you anywhere."

WMJET

"I wouldn't mind (not getting paid), because it would give you experience to make your own money in the long run."

"If it were something you were interested in, and getting hands-on training, and you were learning, plus you're earning credits, and you don't have to go to school, then I wouldn't mind not getting paid."

"If I had a chance to go to a lawyer's office, and they couldn't pay me anything, I would do it. The way I look at it, you make money in the long run from the experience they've given you."

"I'd like anything that pays more than minimum wage."
"Last summer, we found some employers who were willing to give you some good training, but they didn't want to be paying more than minimum wage."

Observation #10

Students mention DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America), COE (Cooperative Office Education), and STEP (Summer Training and Education Program) as programs similar to youth apprenticeship.

Several students in different groups referred to DECA and COE as similar programs. Despite the moderator's description of youth

apprenticeship as incorporating post-secondary learning, many students seemed to focus more on the high school work component, which is what they are most familiar with under DECA and COE.

WMG

"That sounds like STEP. That is where you got out of the classroom for a couple of hours. All the teachers are supposed to help you, but they never helped you."
"They just gave you little tests."
"They told you if you are smart you can figure it out for yourself."
"The teachers don't have enough time. They only have one period to help you, and you don't really want to stay after class, or anything like that."

FSSS

"What you were talking about sounds pretty much like the program we've got here.
COE. Cooperative Office Education. That's where you work in an office building doing office work."

'If the problem is getting into and dealing with people who really want training, why can't we make DECA more like that?"
"From what I've heard about DECA, the difference is that these courses will kind of be rolling over and pertaining to your job. Isn't that correct?"

Observation #11

Students look to counselors and teachers for information. They would be interested in hearing directly from employers and workers about the nature of the occupation and the workplace.

Students report that they look to counselors and teachers for information on programs and opportunities. They would be interested in hearing directly from employers and workers. One student suggested that holding these discussions in small groups would be better than in large assemblies.

FSSS

"Your counselor or the teacher who is going to teach the subject, you should ask them about it, and find out what it would be like."

"It would help (to have an employer come and talk) so you could hear both sides."

"If you could get somebody (who had graduated) to talk about the program, and then somebody from an office or workplace to talk about it and what they do. It would help people to understand what they're going to be in and how things work and what it is going to be like."

V. Observations of First-Year Nursing Students

Participants of the nursing group were all first-year nursing students at Phillips County Community College. They were notified through a class and volunteered to participate. The group was all white, which does not accurately represent the first-year student body. They were all older students, early 20s to late 30s, mostly married and with children, and all women except for one man. Several of the most outspoken group members had not graduated from high school.

Observation #1

Delta nursing students express confidence in being able to stay in the area and find jobs, even if it means commuting. They share a strong desire to stay in the area.

Nursing students echo the dismay at economic and health conditions in the Delta, but unlike many in the Delta parent and high school student focus groups, they express confidence in being able to stay in the area and find jobs, even if it means commuting. There is some agreement that better working conditions, particularly more respect from physicians, can be found in Memphis. These adult students have a strong commitment to staying in the area.

> *"I was born and reared here. Went to a small high school here. And the biggest thing all through high school was I can't wait until I get out to go to college to leave. There's no job here. There's no reason for me to stay. It's just a depressed area. Why would I want to stay here? Now that I'm older, I want to stay here."*

> *"As far as getting entirely away from where we are now, I don't think I ever will. And I think that eventually my children will come back there. And it worries me. Because see my kids are fixing to leave. Last year I had empty nest syndrome."*

> *"I think, one reason, and this is just a personal thing, why we see a small number of hospitals maybe here and maybe our small hospital, is because of ... I keep going back to lack of knowledge. We do not get, in my opinion, to keep a lot of the good quality graduates, a lot of the good quality nurses because they're not allowed to offer the suggestions and incentives here where the doctors are always dominant. What they says goes. You don't have to take that. You can go anywhere. You can drive 70 miles to Memphis."*

> *"The thing about the Delta...99% of the people in this Delta have experienced those needs personally. Like having babies. That's the thing about in the Delta, you can't tell people about needs because they've lived it."*

"It's an exciting time to look around and see what's happening in our world as far as the positive things, in science and medicine and technology. But, as far as what's happening in our Delta, there's no way ... that is a cultural thing. It's absolutely a cultural thing. We're not going to handle it job wise I don't think. It's got to start in the family. Now if you can find some way to say we have got to have a strong family here, that we have strong values, we're going to cut out having these babies at 12 and 13. That's where the problem is. We can call it anything you want to call it. We can paint it any picture you want to paint it. But that's black and white, that's it. That's the reason we have infant mortality."

"There are all sorts of health care facilities around. You have nursing homes, and Clarksdale has a big hospital over there. It's huge for the area. It's about three or four times as big as the one here.

Observation #2

Gender stereotyping in nursing is strong, and young men in high school probably discount it as a viable career option. African Americans appear under-represented in professional hospital staff.

Nursing students confirm the presence of gender stereotyping among allied health occupations. Some technical occupations are predominantly female, such as nursing. Others such as physical therapists and radiological technicians are predominantly male. High school students don't think of nursing as a viable option for men. A couple of students suggested that African Americans are not proportionately represented on the local professional hospital staff.

"We have approximately 100 to 120 students, four of which are male."

"Everywhere they go you see women as nurses. Is there a male nurse at ... Hospital? I've been trying to think. I don't think that there is. There used to be a male LPN. The fact [is] that it's stereotyping, everybody thinks that women are nurses, and men don't do that. And if they do they're "sissies"."
"Most of the physical therapists and the radiology techs ... they're men. You don't see women there. I guess people are brought up to think, if I want to go into allied health, if I'm a girl I'll be a nurse. And if I'm a boy I'll be a doctor."
"If they see it [the breakdown of stereotypes] in those lower grades then they're going to accept it more. Maybe not at first. But later they will."

"I think there's more whites at this hospital, but there's more blacks in this town."

"A lot of them [African Americans] are LPN's. I don't know if that's because they may be disadvantaged monetarily. Or if they were just trying to get in and get out of school. A lot of them are coming back to get their RN's. But a lot of the LPN's that are in this program are white."

"At first they don't know why I'm there. They don't understand. But when I start talking to them about the program and the possibilities of it, they realize that men can be nurses. You don't have to be feminine to be a nurse. All you have to do is be caring for human beings...Because the guys don't know. They don't know the options that they have." [Male student talking about going to high schools to promote the AA program.]

Observation #3

Nursing students are excited about and proud of their profession. They find it attractive for several reasons: family encouragement; the excitement of the medical field; saving lives; the variety of work; plentiful jobs; flexibility; and opportunities for continued learning.

Nursing students cite a number of reasons for their interest in the field. Many were exposed either to the allied health fields or to caring for someone through their families. Some got encouragement from mothers or other female relatives. They are excited about being part of a medical community where knowledge is "exploding." It's an exciting time in medicine and they are part of it all and saving lives. Those who have already spent years as LPNs clearly gain considerable satisfaction—professional and emotional—from the work, and have found their niche. They like the breadth and variety of areas of work: nursing is "individualized." Finally, the money is relatively good and jobs are plentiful. They can contract out and do weekend work. Good employers, such as Memphis hospitals, provide opportunities and funding for continued learning.

Talking to these adults, one gets the sense that there is an ethos about nursing. Strong professional norms provide a sense of professional pride and support among them.

"I think that part of the reason why I got started is that it was for myself. I have a little sister who's a heart patient. And my father has been in and out of the hospital. And since I did not work, and the rest of the family did, a lot of times I was the one that was left to take care of them, while they were in the hospital I'd do what I could. And I think that doing that, I finally realized that if I could do that for them, then I could possibly do it for other people. That's a lot of the reason why I got started."

"I've been an LPN for 12 years. How that started I don't really know. I know I've been giving care all my life. And it just seemed that it's what I was meant to do - care for someone. I just

take care of everybody. It does take a special person to be a nurse. Also, I'll be the only one to say it in the room, the job security. It is a very stable career. And advancement is basically the only way to survive. That's what we're conditioned to believe. And that's why I decided to return and improve my education."

"That's what I think is so great about nursing, because it's so individualized. There are so many different areas that you can do anything in the world you want to do. I have a friend that went to school here...Had an opportunity to work for a drug company, as far as health screening ... Now he's a pharmaceutical rep for them. But he started out as an RN."

"My mother is a nurse. My sister is a nurse. Both of which went here. My sister came back and was an instructor here for awhile. I've been an EMT [Emergency Medical Technician] *for approximately two years. And just from their encouragement I'm looking deeper into the medical field."*

"My mom was a nurse in a doctor's office, so I had a head start more or less into it when I was younger. But then as I got grown I worked in a nursing home as an aid, and we were encouraged to work ... get training and learning more stuff than what we were able to use. So I got to a point where I said if I have to learn all this I'm going to be able to use [it] *and a way that I could do that is become a nurse. And more or less relearning everything that I had learned before, differently, but hopefully being able to use it, putting it in learning."*

"I got married right out of high school and started in with a family and taking care of them ... and just coming back to a point where I felt that I needed something for myself. And was always interested in nursing. I have an aunt and some cousins that are nurses. And they gave me some encouragement. And too I have a child with cerebral palsy, and I want to learn how to take care of him better as he gets older. He's getting more and more problems. And felt like that this would be very beneficial to me in taking care of him. And it's really helped him a lot."

"They say that nurses go into nursing programs with low self-esteem type problems. And I disagree with that ... you have to have motivation and some self-esteem before you can go into the field."

"... two years ago I got back into nursing, and I realized how much I had missed it. I really like it. It just takes a lot of time to get over ... things that you hate about nursing. When you lose patients, or there's nothing else you can do for them, it's hard to sometimes cope with that. But the ones you do save really outweigh anything else."

"It's unlimited the things you can do as a nurse and make money and everything."

"You can contract out. You can ... with this hospital and go to Memphis and work too. We're contracting out more ... two days a week at the Trauma Center."

"My sister works in Memphis. My mother works in Memphis. We all work at the same hospital. They have a student program, where after you've completed your first year, you can take a 10-week summer course which is nothing more than just a little extension training about their hospital, which is a job recruitment which will furnish you a motel room, there at their motel, for your entire stay, and pay you $8 an hour. And you can choose any job that you want. They give you a list. You say I want to go here. They're looking to snag you..."
"Exactly. They offer you a scholarship/loan."

Observation #4

Nursing students are very enthusiastic about the youth apprenticeship concept, at least through high school. They believe there should be an easy exit point after high school and question the value of working part time while getting an Associate.

Nursing students are very enthusiastic about the youth apprenticeship concept, at least through high school. They believe that giving students structured work experience would enable young people to "check out" the health professions. By the time they graduate, they would know whether or not they want to continue with it, which would reduce their likelihood of wasting time at a 2-year school. Early exposure to opportunities in the field would also reduce out-migration. Attracting more committed young people into a high-quality program is also key to improving health care in the region.

They believe that the connection of work experience and more experiential coursework would motivate students to apply themselves to their core subjects, and would give them the critical hands-on learning that they can't get from a book. One participant observed that young people shouldn't "have to wait until they're 18 years old to make a decision." Several wished something like this had been available to them when they were in high school. They had fewer additional responsibilities then and might have been encouraged to take more science courses to form a stronger base. Finally, an additional benefit mentioned by one participant is that, even if after two years students decide not to continue, they will be more health-"compliant."

As for concerns, several participants question the value of a stronger work component in the last two years than the clinical experience they are currently getting in their Associate program. "Why slow yourself down in getting the Associate degree by working?" They believe there should be an easy exit point at the end of 11th and 12th grade. And they question whether enough area hospitals exist.

"My daughter is in the 11th grade and she comes in talking about things that we are talking about in lecture sometimes. It amazes me ... But they don't see how they intertwine with daily living and in the body human. And I think it's the way they're presented to them. They don't think they're really that interested in it."
"They don't have hands-on like we've had."
"That's what I'm saying, they're presenting them with the material to take it as it is. Here it says in the book this, this and this."

"That sounds wonderful. That you're giving them an opportunity to see if this is what they want to do. If they're interested in allied health, and they go into this, and they've got those two years of one day a week at the hospital or two days a week of study just for this ... Come graduation, they've got their career planned. And after they get out they can come straight on into this Associate degree program."
"Yeah. It would get them ready for it or take them completely in the opposite direction because they would know, it ain't for me. And you would save them that time in the first year or two years of college."

"I would pay them to let my child go."

"Look at all of our ages. Probably we wish we had done this when we were 18."

"What you want to know is if you think a program would work on an 11th and 12th grade level. I think it's wonderful. Because what other options do children have? None. Something is better than nothing. Absolutely."

"Then I think that we won't see as many people leaving. I don't think we'll see as many people feeling they had to go to another area."

"And I believe that if the quality of health care improves, which I believe it will, with a program like this, then we will see more people staying like my family. If we need a doctor, we don't go here, we drive to Memphis. If we need to go to the hospital, we go to Memphis. Just because we have more confidence. Just because the way it is in this area is it doesn't matter what input you have, they're always right, they do not listen. They stereotype every problem that there is. I think if we show these kids that that doesn't have to go on, that they can have a say, that the nurse is actually a very important tool, ... like a health worker is a very important tool in the whole diagnostic process, then they will be able to say hey, hold on, that's not really true, let's look at it a different way. Whereas the people that are working here now have worked here most of their life and will work here forever. They do not want to make waves for fear of losing their jobs. But if we get a new crop of people coming in maybe it won't work at first, but that next person that comes in, then the next person, then the next person. By repetition, by keep beating down the

system, we're going to be able to change and evolve into a system where we actually need a good health care facility here ... If we get good quality kids here that know what is supposed to be done, then how come they can't make the change?"

"For a semester over here I was in class with a couple of kids who were still in high school ... They were focused. They knew what they wanted to do even at that point. Had it been offered to them in high school, they would have been availing themselves..."

"I wish I had [taken more science classes in high school]. I took science and then I ... And I really needed a lot more. You didn't have anyone to encourage you to take science classes. It wasn't that attractive to us, to what we could get into."

"If we teach our kids today, starting in the 11th, 12th, maybe even before what goes on with their body, what all these health care systems mean — the micro, the A&P, teaching them about hospitals — maybe they will be more compliant. [e.g. with taking medications]. Which even if after the two-year program they do not want to go into the health care field themselves, they will have a more than general knowledge of how the health care system works. And since our nation is becoming a healthier nation, this will make our job, as health care workers ... easier because they will be more compliant."

"...there needs to be an easy out for them if they've gotten that 11th and 12th grade, if that's not the field they like, to get out."

"One of the key things is whatever is set up must have some type of clinical setting."

"If they're advanced enough to go through this, then they're advanced enough to take every subject in nursing too."

"When you're committing them to four years, that's too long. If you commit them to that 11th and 12th grade experience to say "hey, you commit yourself these two years, you don't like it, get out. If you like it, then here's what we offer you after that.""

"The 11th and 12th year could be fine. But that kid can come out of high school and come here and have their Associate degree in two years. You get a whole two years. And now here you're saying that for four years they're still behind credits toward their Associate degree. And the way our society is now it's "hurry up and get done." I want to get this done so I can get my career started and go on with my life."

"Think how much more confident in themselves they would be coming into our program if they had something like that. But the problem I see with the first two years of college, they can have their Associate degree in two years. You see what I'm saying? I'm saying the 11th and 12th grade sounds like a dream, sounds brilliant. That sounds wonderful."

Observation #5

Nursing students, many of whom are parents, believe a rural Youth Health Corps could address the problem of teen pregnancy.

Nursing students believe that by structuring peer education, a Youth Health Corps in rural areas could address the problem of teen pregnancy. They view this problem as significant.

> *"I think with the high teenage pregnancy rate here, and being a teenage mother myself, that if you give these kids a chance to talk with other teenage mothers, it's going to help the community. It's going to help them, because they can talk on a level with these girls that we can't. I mean, yes, I can talk to my teenager, but when you start talking to some that have already had children about birth control, at my age, they don't want to hear it. But if you've got a teenager talking with them on their own level, they may listen better. Also, I think if they start out at that age doing this with other kids, then they'll have a better perspective as they get older with other teenagers - a perspective that maybe we don't have."*

> *"I agree with it. The problem of teen pregnancy is something I don't think will be solved in one generation because it didn't happen in one generation. It will be an inter-generational progression."*

Observation #6

Few nursing students wish to work in geriatrics, which is viewed as emotionally taxing. They question whether young people could handle working in nursing homes. They are also concerned that exposure to some work could be disturbing to young people.

Nursing students believe that working in nursing homes is "emotionally taxing" and "takes a certain mindset." They wonder whether young people could handle geriatrics, although they believe it would depend on the person. And some worry that young people might be scared or disturbed by some of the cases they might have to work with, particularly in Trauma, or working with the permanently ill.

> *"It takes a certain mindset, just like it does for somebody working in surgery or somebody to work trauma.*

> *"It's emotionally taxing."*

> *"It's a mindset that's within the person. You couldn't take 12 people and say you, you're going to work in a nursing home and do well."*

> *"It depends on the person. Because I don't do well with geriatrics. I do on a short term basis. I can treat them, get them over this and send them back to the nursing home. And I can do that for months. But I can't go in and see it everyday."*

"Some people just really like that. We all know that older people really respond to younger people in a very open receptive way."

"... at 16 and seeing somebody in a lot of pain, a lot of times that's just going to terrify them. Pain scares people."
"Or the permanently ill."
"I think we're second guessing. And I don't think we can do that with kids. Kids are sharp. I don't we can second guess..."

Observation #7

Nursing students strongly recommend that a key design feature of the program be several relatively brief rotations through different types of work within the allied health fields.

Nursing students value highly the job rotations they have experienced in their health-related working lives. They view rotation as the only way for someone to find their niche within the field, that which someone really loves doing. They recommend rotations lasting six to eight weeks at minimum, and less than six months.

"Rotation is one of the most important parts of the program I think."

"Since their school system is set up semesterly I think going two areas a semester. "

"My situation is I'm always looking for greener grasses. I've worked in administration, I worked in a doctor's office. I've worked in different areas on the hospital floor. If you put these kids in a six month rotation at one time, that's going to cut down their time to be in other areas. Six or eight weeks in a setting would be better."

"But we had students that came in, out of high school like you said, and this week they're going to be in the nursery. And they come back and say "I'll work the nursery". And the next week they go to surgery. "No, I changed my mind. I want to work surgery." They're overwhelmed with all this excitement. "

"Not that long [six months]. *Shorter span. But certainly the exposure is great. On a personal basis, I nursed, I worked in a doctor's office, and I did the equivalent of Step Down, which is ICU.* [Intensive Care Unit] *I didn't like those, but when I got to surgery, I knew that's what I loved. And if I didn't have that kind of experience and that kind of rotation I would never have known that."*

VI. Methodology

Group discussions—also known as "focus groups"—are particularly well suited for this type of study. They provide an opportunity to engage people in conversation and to probe beneath the surface of people's opinions, which survey research cannot do. Focus groups clarify where people "start" a discussion on particular issues, uncover what they know and don't know about those issues, identify their perceptions and misperceptions, and determine areas where informational and emotional obstacles prevent people from seriously considering the issues and options for action. Moreover, group discussions reveal how people's views can change as they have the opportunity to learn more about and discuss an issue over time.

The group discussions conducted for this study were analyzed to reveal "themes" of how people talk and think about issues concerning preparation for work. The research is qualitative. The observations are, strictly speaking, "hypotheses" that would need to be validated by reliable quantitative methods before they could be considered definitive. Still the observations are suggestive of parents' and students' views on what teenagers want and need to prepare for meaningful careers. The research technique is qualitative. Thus the observations detailed in this report should not be mistaken for findings from a random sample survey.

Each of the group discussions for this study had seven to twelve people. In total, they represent a cross-section of parents and students in terms of age, race, gender, occupation, and income level. All groups were weighted towards students, or parents of students, who were unlikely to enroll directly after graduation in a 4-year college program. Each group lasted one to two hours, and was led by a trained moderator. To respect their privacy, participants were promised that their names would not appear in this report.

The participants for the Marianna parent group were recruited by sending invitations home with a selected group of students. The participants were African American and almost all female. Participants of the Fort Smith parent group were recruited by sending invitations home with a selected group of North Side and South Side students and through some ad hoc recruitment. Participants were all white, which is not representative of the Fort Smith area, and mostly female. Groups were held in the evening at a central "neutral" location, and parents were paid $25 and offered dinner for their time.

Participants for the high school groups were selected by school administrators. Each included a relatively even balance of young men and women. The Fort Smith groups were heavily weighted towards at-risk students and those who were unlikely to pursue college immediately. Participants were almost all white, but included one or two African American and Asian students. One West Memphis group was a Junior Executive Training (JET) class.

Methodology

Since the feasibility study sought to examine ways that youth apprenticeship could build on entrepreneurship training, particularly in the Delta region, the view of these students were of particular interest. The other West Memphis group included general and college-prep students. The Marianna group was more heavily weighted towards college bound students and had a mix of white and African American participants.

Participants of the nursing group were all first-year nursing students. They were recruited from a class by volunteering for this unpaid group. The group was all white, which does not accurately represent the first-year student body. They were all older students, early 20s to late 30s, and all women except for one man.

To ensure geographic diversity and the representation of a variety of views, group discussions were conducted across the state in the following communities:

Group	*Community*	*Date*
Parents	Marianna (Lee County)	February 27, 1991
Parents	Fort Smith	February 26, 1991
High school students	Marianna (Lee County)	February 12, 1991
High school students1	West Memphis	February 11, 1991
High school students2	West Memphis	February 11, 1991
High school students	Fort Smith, South	February 26, 1991
High school students	Fort Smith, North	February 26, 1991
Nursing students	Helena	February 27, 1991

Voices from School and Home
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